

Skateboarding IS a crime

Capitola will study town-teen conflict

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CAPITOLA — For a teen-ager, skateboarding may be a sport, but to police officers here, it's often a violation of the law.

It's also an irritation for property owners, and the first topic set to be studied by a soon-to-be-formed youth commission.

"It's not an insignificant part of our work," said Police Chief Don Braunton, explaining that Capitola's stringent skateboarding ordinance prohibits riding in the Esplanade at all times and between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. in the rest of Capitola Village.

Public walls, construction projects on public property and Esplanade Park also have become off-limits since the skateboarding ordinance was adopted in 1987.

While there is no record of how many citations have been issued this year, the 50 skateboards that Braunton estimates have been seized tell the story.

The majority of skateboarding violations the police respond to are those reported by the stores and offices that have been included in the "no skateboard" area.

The Trade Winds mobile home park on Jade Street is the most recent area to become off-limits to skateboarders. The residents' association appealed to the council in June to prohibit their use at the park.

The property was recently repaved, and residents wanted to avert any problems with skateboarders, said Donna Brown, president of the Trade Winds Residents Association Inc.

"We wanted to nip it in the bud," she said.

In a letter to the City Council, Brown pointed out the increased use of the streets by skateboarders posed a hazard to the senior citizens who live at the park.

The first time a skateboarder is stopped, he receives a warning. Get stopped a second time and

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it's an \$82 citation — not cheap for teens who ride for fun or as their transportation.

An officer who spies a repeat offender may seize the skateboard, which costs on average about \$150 for a top model.

Kids are upset because there is no place for them to skate, said Sabian DeSpenza, owner of Skate Outlet Santa Cruz on 41st Avenue.

Years ago, there was a skateboard park in Soquel, but it closed in 1979 after being in operation a year and a half.

De Spenza said he understands why businesses are concerned, but noted kids will generally leave if asked.

Nick Calderon, 15, who goes to Soquel High, has been skateboarding for years, he said, as he stood at Jade Street Park, another site where skateboarding is a crime.

Calderon said he has been warned by police and private security guards around town, but has not received a citation.

"Skateboarding is a sport," he said.

A 23-year-old skateboarder, who asked not to be identified, offered a different description. "It's like an addiction. I can't stop skateboarding. It's fun. It's an adrenaline rush."

Mayor Ron Graves, who has been on the council for 22 years, said he agrees with the popular



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More and more of Capitola is closed to skateboarders.

bumper sticker, "Skateboarding is not a crime."

Still, he noted, both private and public property have been damaged by skateboards.

"Some skateboard to school, some for recreation, but some like the hotdogging that can be destructive to public property," he said. "I would like the best of both worlds."

It was complaints from merchants and people in the village area, not the council, that prompted the skateboarding restrictions, Graves said.

"I'd say it has been seen as a problem," said Councilwoman Margaret Fabrizio. "For the kids, there is no place to skateboard. For

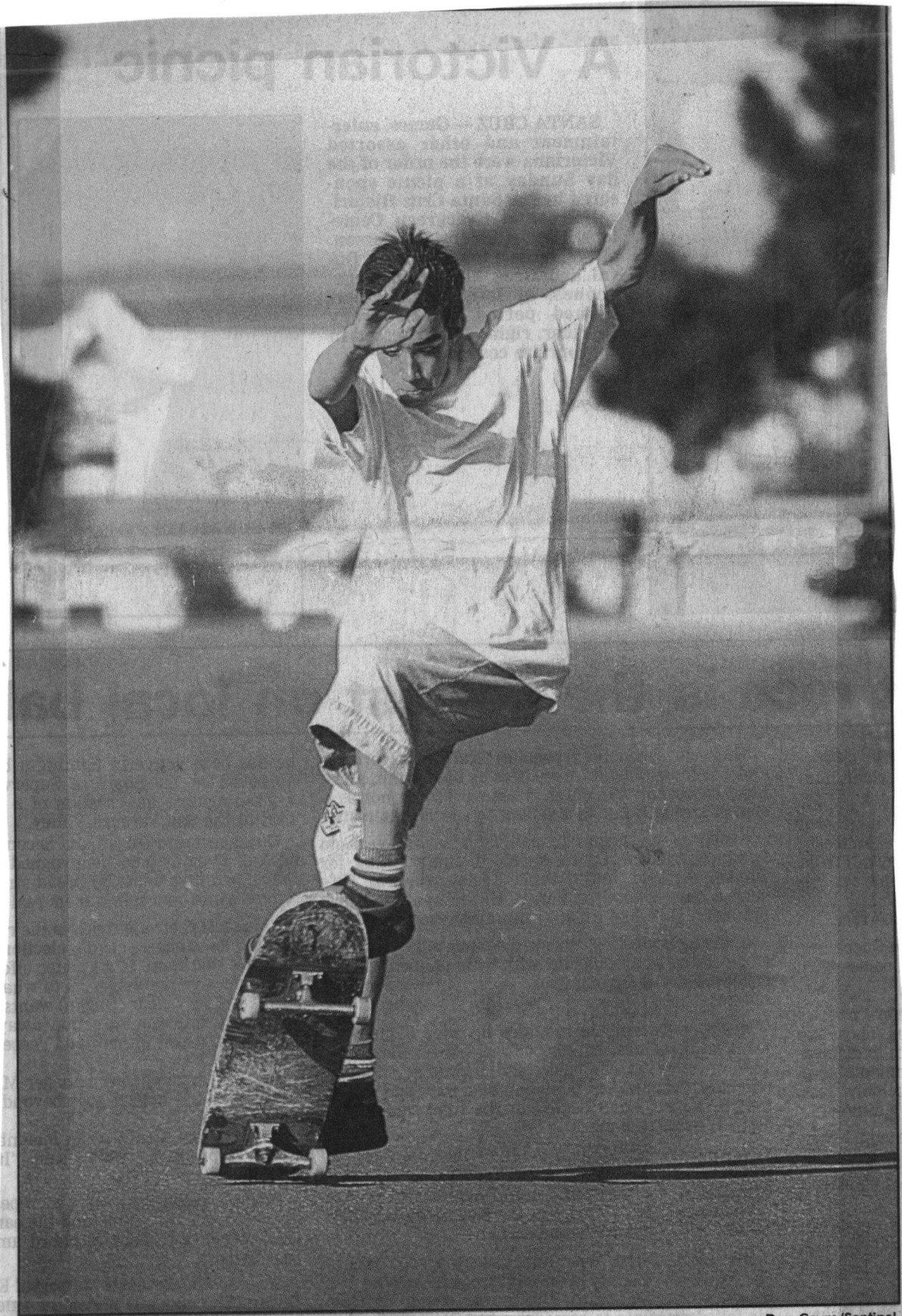
adults, they don't want to run over a child."

Fabrizio, who was elected in April, has spearheaded the formation of a youth commission to advise the City Council on issues affecting children and young adults in Capitola.

Skateboarding has been the first issue identified for study by the commission, she said.

Applicants will be interviewed in the next few weeks and the commission may be appointed by the end of the month, Fabrizio said.

"We recognize kids don't have any place to practice their sport," she said. "Some of the solutions need to come from the kids. It's their issue in many ways."



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Nick Calderon skates near 41st Avenue in Capitola, a town with tough skateboard restrictions.